Sociolinguistic variation in English: Phonetics and phonology

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1 Aims

The general aims of this course are to:

- develop your research skills, including:
  - identifying the kinds of information you need (after identifying a specific project topic);
  - looking for that information (including identifying the possible sources);
  - assimilating and analysing the information;
- identify a specific topic for your research project;
- design and carry out the research project;
- share your results by delivering an oral presentation in class and by preparing a written report (the BA thesis) that is logical, well-structured, as well as formally and technically adequate;
- expand your research interest in linguistics.

The specific deliverables are:

- a completed BA thesis;
- improved research skills, including oral and written presentation skills;
- some expertise in the seminar’s subject area.

2 Requirements

To successfully complete the seminar, you will be required to: (1) Attend the classes; (2) Complete all reading assignments; (3) Actively participate in class discussion; (4) Prepare and deliver at least one oral presentation; (5) Complete a written thesis on your selected topic (with possible assistance from the instructor).

One unexcused absence per semester is permitted. However, I strongly advise to participate in as many classes as possible without exposing your health or personal life to undue hazards, as each class will contain information that could prove useful in the writing of your own paper, even if the topic seems less directly related to your own topic.

3 Content

It is important to see the deliverables of this course as going well beyond learning about English sociophonetics and sociophonology. Being able to do solid research will be useful not only in an MA seminar (if you plan to continue your education) but also in many prospective jobs, and life in general 😊.

The seminar will be devoted to phonetic and phonological variation in English around the world (mostly, but not entirely, limited to current ‘modern’ accents). During the first meetings, you will be provided with an overview/consolidation of some basic phonetic, phonological and sociolinguistic notions that will be necessary for further work in the area. Some introductory information on selected English accents will also be provided. Subsequent meetings will discuss specific problems in variationist research in phonetics and phonology. There will also be time for your presentations as well as discussion of the ‘technical’ aspects of doing research and writing an academic paper – see below.
4 ‘Technical’ aspects

You will be provided with information on how to locate references for your work to build a bibliography, including the use of modern research tools, such as the Internet in general, and article databases, online journals and similar resources in particular. There will also be discussion of how to organise the thesis in structural and formal terms, and how to go about text editing. As academic writing is taught in another course, it will not be featured prominently. All the same, some additional guidance will be offered. Wray et al. (1998) is the recommended source in this area.

There will also be some discussion of instrumental phonetic techniques, and basic statistics as used in sociolinguistic research.

5 Duty hours

These are for you to use. If you have any problems or questions, do not hesitate to contact me during my duty hours before you run into trouble.

If you need to contact me outside of the duty hours, e-mail is by far the best option.

6 Deadlines

IT IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL TO ADHERE TO THESE IN YOUR OWN INTEREST. I will not be flexible in my approach to the following deadlines:

4. 3000 words: 6 February 2006.
5. 6000 words: 6 March 2006.
8. BA exam: June 2006.

7 Suggested topics

- Comparison of a selected set of phonetic/phonological characteristics across a number of accents. (Note: British and American standards are excluded from this topic.)
- Perception of phonetic and phonological variation in English by non-native speakers (e.g. Poles).
- Attitudes towards various English accents among native and non-native speakers (e.g. Poles).
- The current accent situation in the UK and USA (standards etc.).
- Phonetic and phonological variation in the electronic media (TV, film, radio, Internet etc.).
- The role of (selected aspects of) phonetic variation in EFL/ESL teaching.
- Sociophonetic and sociophonological variation in L2 English (e.g. as spoken by Poles).
- Any other reasonable topic suggested by the student. (Note: In this case, the topic must be very specific and well thought out!)

General note: Empirical and experimental projects will be favoured. Giving good structure to your research project in general, and to your BA thesis in particular is much easier in an empirical study.
**Essential sources**


**Selected journals:**


*Language Variation and Change*. Cambridge University Press.
[http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=LVC](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=LVC)

**Important note on journal availability**

The journals above are all available in print from IFA Library. Also, newer issues are available online from the main University Library using computers at IFA, or from home (sic!).


Information on how to access the journals from home is available at [http://lib.amu.edu.pl/_e_czasopisma.htm](http://lib.amu.edu.pl/_e_czasopisma.htm).

**Online resources:**

International Dialects of English Archive: [http://www.ukans.edu/~idea/](http://www.ukans.edu/~idea/)

Intonational Variation in English Downloads: [http://www.phon.ox.ac.uk/~esther/fvyweb/](http://www.phon.ox.ac.uk/~esther/fvyweb/)

Links to other resources available from my www page at [http://elex.amu.edu.pl/~wjarek/](http://elex.amu.edu.pl/~wjarek/)

Assorted papers and other sources, including recordings, will be provided in class.